

Foreword

Alḥamdulillāh on the 29th of Ramaḍān 1400 AH / 12th August 1980 *Tadabbur-i Qur'ān* reached its completion. This *tafsīr* was begun around 1958. This means that it took almost twenty three long years of hard toil to complete. In this long journey, the phases through which I passed, the trials I had to face and the manner in which my Lord helped me all along made me learn many a lesson. However, I have no intention in using up the time of my readers in recounting this story. I have kept it a secret between myself and God and would like it to remain so. Nevertheless, I am extremely grateful to Him that He blessed a person of humble beginnings and resources like me to serve His Book in such a manner that could only have been achieved through His special favour.

As I have just mentioned, I started writing this *tafsīr* in 1958. However, I had started its academic preparation way back in 1925. It is this year in which I was fortunate enough to enter into the tutelage of Mawlānā Ḥamīd al-Dīn Farāhī, and for the next five years I remained his student. After that, the Qur'ān became a constant subject of my reflection and deliberation. Viewed thus, this *tafsīr* is the result of fifty five years of hard work. However, it does not contain only my views; it also reflects the views of my mentor. I have already mentioned in the foreword of this *tafsīr* that my views are not independent of those of my mentor; they in fact are a culmination and supplement of his views. I have clearly mentioned his views which directly relate to the Qur'ān and if I have found some void in them I have tried to fill it. As far as I know, my mentor began deliberating on the Qur'ān during his stay in Aligarh and continued with it regularly till his last breath. A rough estimate puts this period to thirty to thirty five years. This, in other words, means that the six thousand pages of this *tafsīr* brings before the readers the academic work of almost one century. This work can be termed as a representative of the Farāhī school.

I have already explained the methodology adopted in this *tafsīr* in the foreword: The direct method has been employed for reflection on the Qur'ān and for solving difficulties encountered. In other words, the real source of the *tafsīr* is the language of the Qur'ān, the context and placement of its verses and parallels drawn from within its text. Merely citing various opinions of the past has not been done, as is generally the case in current times. The Arabic language has been resorted to directly

for researching out the meanings of words and stylistic features and for solving syntactical difficulties. Reliance has not been made merely on the opinions of scholars. Similarly, while interpreting verses, full importance has been given to the language of the Qur'ān, the context of the discourse and parallels found in the text. An opinion has not been adopted merely because it was proffered by an early authority. Consequently, instead of mentioning copious quotations from past works, each verse is distinctly interpreted on the basis of arguments.

Efforts have also been made to highlight the logic and wisdom of the Qur'ān in this *tafsīr*. The purpose is to bring to the foreground its intellectual arguments and reasoning in a forceful and appealing manner, and in this way the difference between the obsolete style of reasoning of the scholastics and the natural style of reasoning of the Qur'ān is also highlighted.

Full guidance has been sought from earlier *tafsīrs*, ancient scriptures, books of history and books which state the occasion of revelation of a verse. However, this guidance has always remained subservient to the import of the Qur'ān. These resources have never been given authority over the Qur'ān, and have not been allowed to govern the interpretation of the Qur'ān whether its words accept them or not.

The beauty and elegance of a higher discourse rests on its coherent structure and on its arrangement, and the effectiveness of its reasoning is also dependent on these factors. For this reason, utmost efforts have been made in this *tafsīr* to highlight this aspect of the Qur'ān so that those who think that this Book does not require any coherence and sequence are convinced to the contrary. By analyzing the contents of each *sūrah*, the central theme and subject of each *sūrah* is ascertained. As a result, each *sūrah* comes out to be a very effective and eloquent oration on a specific subject. The analysis of the discourse has been conducted in a manner so that the sequence of the verses is brought out of its own accord and its relationship with the central theme is also unveiled.

Moreover, the real beauty of the underlying wisdom in the arrangement of the *sūrahs* was hitherto concealed. I have for the first time tried to explain this wisdom in this *tafsīr*. I have shown that these *sūrahs* are divided into seven groups. In each group, the Makkan *sūrahs* precede the Madīnan ones. Moreover, each *sūrah* has its counterpart and the two form a pair. If at any place, this principle has not been followed, it is because of some valid reason, which I have tried to explain. Just as each *sūrah* has a central theme, each group also has a central theme which dominates the whole group. In my opinion, this arrangement itself is based on the Qur'ān, and I have tried to explain how this is so.

When in the foreword I had mentioned these features of this *tafsīr*, people only had the first volume in their hands. So, there was the possibility that people could regard these features to be very strange. Today, with the grace of God, the complete *tafsīr* from Sūrah Fātiḥah to Sūrah Nās is before the readers. They can now judge whether this *tafsīr* conforms to the principles stated in the foreword, and whether these principles are very natural, based on reason and scientific for deliberation on the Qur'ān. Readers should also reflect if without adopting these principles the treasure of wisdom of the Qur'ān can be accessed or not. It is deriving benefit from this very treasure of wisdom for which this Book has been revealed by the Almighty.

It should be kept in mind that the Almighty has invested this Qur'ān with the status of a barometer between good and evil and then handed it to us. If this barometer does not remain with us or if we are not aware of the method of using it, we will have no means to distinguish good from evil. With great sorrow, I am compelled to submit that we Muslims find ourselves in this situation. Though we have the Qur'ān with us, we do not have its true knowledge. It is generally read to gain reward or to transfer reward to a deceased or selling its copies. The more vehemently a person takes its name, the farther away is he from its true comprehension. If we want to keep this *ummah* alive in its capacity as the Muslim *ummah*, then this will not be achieved by merely talking about achieving this unity or by blindly reading the Qur'ān. The foremost thing which will help realizing this goal is to highlight its true knowledge. Only those who have its true knowledge will practice it in the right way and it is only through the blessed hands of such people that this *ummah* can be reformed: لا يصلح آخره إلا بما صلح به أوله (the reformation of the later members of this *ummah* will take place through the way its earliest members were *ummah* reformed).¹

It would also not be inappropriate to mention here that I have not written this book merely to satisfy my passion for writing; in fact, I have been compelled to write it to fulfill an obligation. In the foreword of one of the previous volumes, I have mentioned that when I started this work, I felt as if I have flung myself into a deep sea disregarding whether I will be able to swim across it or drown in it. Before embarking on this voyage I had fully assessed its hardships and hazards. I knew what I had to write, the manner in which I had to write and the audience for whom I should write and the extent of acknowledgement I would receive for this. For this reason, though I found myself compelled to initiate this work, I also had this latent desire that somehow I be relieved of the

1. al-Muttaqī Ibn Ḥassām al-Dīn, *Kanz al-'Ummāl fī Sunan al-Aqwāl wa al-Af'āl*. 1st ed., vol. 5 (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-'ilmiyyah, 1998), 271.

responsibility of this work. Thus when I fell severely ill in 1971-72, and my doctors stopped me from doing mental work because they thought that I had over-taxed my brains, I never felt any sadness that my work would remain incomplete. In fact, I was fully satisfied that my work could be completed to the extent my Lord had willed. If it is not his will that it should go on, then there must be some wisdom in it and I should be happy with this decision. I used to tell my friends that even if I get the opportunity to complete this *tafsīr* till Sūrah Tawbah, I will think that my mission has been accomplished. This was because this amount of *tafsīr* would be sufficient to demonstrate the veracity and value of the principles of *tafsīr* enunciated by my late mentor.

Later, when I recovered from my illness, my circumstances compelled me to migrate from Lahore and settle in Rahmānābād, a suburban village of Sheikhpura. In this village, neither did I have a proper house to live in neither was there any electricity and some other amenities in the first four years. So this initial period was very trying. In these circumstances, it was very difficult to incline myself even to some very ordinary academic work what to speak of writing a *tafsīr*. However, I had made up my mind that if ever I would write something, it would be the *tafsīr Tadabbur-i Qur'ān*. Writing anything else would amount to showing ingratitude to the Almighty Who had once again blessed me with the power and strength to write. Consequently, this is a fact that I wrote the *tafsīrs* of many *sūrahs* under a *shīsham* or *sirsā* tree. Typically I would face an onslaught from birds and hornets from above while a swarm of flies would engulf me from below, the manuscript would be sweat-ridden and I would be so engrossed in solving a difficult verse that I would be oblivious of what was going on around me.

It would also not be inopportune to mention that the Almighty has gifted me with some talent for writing, yet I have no sense to publish and print my writings. I also have no regrets on this deficiency. I am satisfied that my duty was to write and write I did. My task was not to print and sell it. As far as my livelihood is concerned, I have neither done anything for it nor can I do anything for it now. I have been jokingly saying to my friends and today I am writing it quite seriously that against both religious and worldly customs my maintenance and financial responsibility has remained with my wife. She had inherited some lands from her father. I have been looking after them. It is through this earning that we have been financially managing ourselves, and since pomp and status have never been a part of our lives, this earning was quite enough for us. I have full conviction that the Lord who nourished me in childhood and provided for me in my youth will not leave me a pauper in old age. It is this conviction which is my real asset.

I have mentioned earlier that I was not very hopeful about the future of this book. I have known that if this world has failed to give recognition to a researcher as prodigious as Imām Farāhī how can it recognize [an ordinary person like] me. However, I had to carry out an obligation, and so without any hope of reward and admiration I began this work. Now after twenty three years my assessment is totally different than it was earlier. On the basis of some very clear and trustworthy information, I am of the opinion that the thought presented in this *tafsīr* is spreading so fast among learned people that soon it will win over the intelligentsia. I have had the chance of meeting scholars of all schools of thought as well as modern educated people. I have found all of them acknowledging it and expressing admiration for it. They have assured me that this *tafsīr* presents the right methodology in understanding and teaching the Qur’ān. They have been praying that this *tafsīr* comes before them in its finished form so that they are able to benefit from it in their lectures and teaching. There are many mosques and religious seminaries in Pakistan and India in which Qur’ānic lectures are delivered in the light of this *tafsīr*. People living in Europe, America, Arabia, Africa and Burma who have been able to read a part of this *tafsīr* are anxious to read the whole of it. They have expressed their opinion that this *tafsīr* presents the scientific way of deliberating on the Qur’ān. No other way can appeal to the people of these times. These people are also insisting of having it translated into Arabic and English. They say that the educated non-Muslims who have been able to read a part of it have become its fans. Some universities in Egypt and some other countries have already given doctoral degrees to students who have done research on the Farāhī school. In some research institutes of Pakistan also, research is being conducted on the Farāhī approach.

People do not complain that this *tafsīr* is difficult and beyond comprehension. They say that it contains what a *tafsīr* should befittingly contain. It is equally beneficial for people of all walks of life whether a person is a scholar or a commoner. I have a vast record of such opinions lying with me. However, I want that people should judge this *tafsīr* in the light of its features and asses it themselves; they should not form an opinion while being influenced by others. For this reason, I have not published these letters.

I never found my mentor worried about the publication of his works. So much so, he never ever said a word to me about this. However, he would repeatedly advise us to write or speak about something after complete research and a lot of deliberation. What is strongly reasoned out always takes roots. What stands on weak reasoning may pass for some time but it will soon be ousted. This motto of my mentor is *alḥamdulillāh* now proving fully true to me.

Although I have spent my whole youth and later age in the preparation and writing of this *tafsīr*, I am not presenting it before my readers with the claim that I have successfully made them understand the Qur'ān or that I have compiled the complete knowledge of the Qur'ān in this *tafsīr*. The Qur'ān is an unfathomable sea of knowledge and wisdom. No one except its author can encompass all its knowledge. However, I do have the feeling that through this *tafsīr*, I have paved the way to deliberating on the Book of God. If readers take the principles mentioned in this *tafsīr* as their guide and then reflect on the Qur'ān, I have full faith that they will be able to access the treasures of wisdom which are found in it. I claim nothing beyond this, and this is no ordinary an achievement. If readers are able to understand the Qur'ān on the basis of these principles, they will find it to be a barometer for the truth through which they can distinguish right views from wrong ones and sift out what is correct from the incorrect. It will become very easy for them to judge the veracity of various issues of *fiqh*, scholasticism, *aḥādith*, philosophy and *taṣawwuf*. This approach will break the shackles of blind following which has divided this *ummah* into various sects, and who knows it might pave the way for a revolution which makes a dispersed *ummah* into a united force to reckon with. Nevertheless I have only paved the way to understanding the Qur'ān. A lot of work still remains, and has to be done by those who will come after me:

*gumān mabur keh ba pāyān rasīd kār-i mughān
hazār bādah-i nakhurdah dar rag-i tāk ast*

If one is able to have a true comprehension of the Qur'ān, it is like being blessed with light on all sides. Neither can a classical interpretation or discipline lead one astray nor a modern one. Being equipped with this ability is the real key to knowledge. If a person is not able to take hold of this key or if he is given this key yet is unable to value it, then he will never be able to get out from the darkness which today engulfs him. I beseech the youth and the adults of this age that if they hold dear their own future and that of this *ummah*, they should not see who has expressed a particular opinion; they should only see what has been expressed. The truth is a common asset for all; no one has monopoly over it. Moreover, the loss of not valuing and recognizing a truth is that of the person who adopts this attitude; the one who presents it never loses anything.

When on the 29th of Ramadān 1400 AH I wrote the last lines of this *tafsīr*, I felt that not only have I completed this book I have also ended the last chapter of my life. No doubt, I was naturally elated to be relieved of a heavy burden I had been carrying for twenty three years; however, I also felt depleted and exhausted to do anything else and felt that there

would be nothing else from which I could derive the pleasure of life. After writing these last lines, I prostrated myself before the Almighty. My sole prayer in this state was: “Lord! If you have given me the honour to be of service to Your noble book, please accept my effort, and make it a means of my salvation. I have no other desire.” Whoever reads these lines is also requested to say amen to this prayer.

I trudged through a major part of this journey by myself; however, at times, I did find some mates in this journey. Still fresh in my memory is the time spent in their company as much as they were able to take out and these cherished moments shall forever remain with me. I have already mentioned some of these friends in the forewords of previous volumes and would not repeat them here; however, it is essential that I express my gratitude to some others who have not yet been mentioned in this book. They have been very helpful to me in the affairs of this book and I feel extremely indebted to them for their selfless co-operation. My dear Ghulām Ṣamdānī, who is currently residing in the States, remained of service to me even more than my own sons. He used to copy the manuscripts of the book with great devotion and adeptness. My friend ‘Abdullāh Ghulām Aḥmad, in spite of being an employee WAPDA, also had a great share in this copying out and I also benefited a great deal from his intelligence in solving the problems encountered in this *tafsīr*. My friend Khalīd Masūd has already remained a great help in finding various references for citation; however, young Javed Aḥmad has also helped me in locating certain other references for which I am very grateful to him.

Majid Khāwar’s name is now a part of this book’s history. When I expressed my dissatisfaction on the previous system of publishing this book, he came forward and assured me that he himself will take up this task according to a program. I was very happy to see him take this initiative. Although in the beginning I was not satisfied with the extent of experience he had in these matters, God blessed his efforts. He was able to carry out the task as per the promised schedule and succeeded in a grand manner.

I am grateful to all these friends and pray that the Almighty take some service from them which becomes instrumental in their success not only in this world but also in the next.

wassalam

Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāhī

Lahore

9th November 1980 AD

30th Dhū al-Ḥajj 1400 AH.